Número 1°: Miscelánea

TRADITORI
Literatura . Dramaturgia . Género

ARTÍCULO

Más allá del beso: la transformación de los estereotipos femeninos en El Príncipe Sapo de los hermanos Grimm y La Princesa y el Sapo de Disney

Beyond the Kiss: Transforming Female Stereotypes in The Frog Prince by the Brothers Grimm and Disney's The Princess and the Frog

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.26752/tr.v1i1.767

Resumen

A lo largo de la historia, los cuentos de hadas han jugado un papel fundamental en la construcción de imaginarios sociales y en la transmisión de valores culturales, especialmente en lo relacionado a los roles de género. Este trabajo realiza un análisis comparativo entre la versión clásica de "El príncipe rana", recopilada por los Hermanos Grimm, y su adaptación moderna en la película "La princesa y el sapo" (2009) de Disney, con el objetivo de explorar cómo se representan los estereotipos femeninos en ambas narrativas. Mientras que la princesa en la versión original es mostrada como una figura pasiva y dependiente, cuyo destino se define por un acto de obediencia y una transformación mágica. En la adaptación de Disney; La princesa Tiana, es retratada como una mujer afroamericana fuerte, independiente y ambiciosa, que lucha por cumplir sus sueños mediante el esfuerzo y la perseverancia.

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Recibido: 02/03/2025
Aceptado: 01/05/2025

ISSN: 3100-9433 | Número 1 | Miscelánea | Enero-junio

A través del análisis, observo que, aunque la versión moderna presenta un cambio significativo, considero que sigue siendo importante en la representación de la mujer ya que refleja los avances y la ruptura de prejuicios tradicionales. El presente análisis evidencia que los relatos infantiles no solo entretienen, sino que estos influyen positiva o negativamente desde la infancia en la percepción de los roles de género. Por eso, creo que es fundamental revisar críticamente estas narrativas para promover representaciones más inclusivas y empoderadas de las mujeres en la sociedad actual.

Palabras clave: Estereotipos de Genero, Literatura Infantil, Feminismo

Abstract

Throughout history, fairy tales have played a fundamental role in the construction of social imaginaries and the transmission of cultural values, especially those related to gender roles. This paper presents a comparative analysis between the classic version of "The Frog Prince", compiled by the Brothers Grimm, and its modern adaptation in Disney's The Princess and the Frog (2009), with the aim of exploring how female stereotypes are represented in both narratives. While the princess in the original version is portrayed as a passive and dependent figure, whose destiny is defined by an act of obedience and a magical transformation, in Disney's adaptation, Princess Tiana, she is portrayed as a strong, independent, and ambitious African American woman who strives to fulfill her dreams through effort and perseverance.

Through this analysis, I observe that although the modern version presents a significant change, I believe it remains important in the representation of women as it reflects progress and the breaking of traditional prejudices. This analysis shows that children's stories not only entertain, but also positively or negatively influence perceptions of gender roles from childhood onward. Therefore, I believe it is essential to critically review these narratives to promote more inclusive and empowering representations of women in today's society.

Keywords: Gender Stereotypes, Children's Literature, Feminism

Introduction

Since I was little, I've felt that many of the stories we hear in childhood leave a deep and indelible mark. Not only because of their magic, their fantasy, or because they are such a powerful and magical means of cultural transmission, but also because of the values they instill in us about how we should be. Growing up, I realized that fairy tales have profoundly influenced the way we understand gender roles, teaching us, directly or indirectly, what is expected of men and women. These narratives don't just entertain us; they also convey moral and ethical teachings, build social imaginaries, and create an emotional connection between us and the characters.

Representations of gender have impacted the perception of feminine and masculine roles in different ways. Through idealized or punished characters, these stories have historically contributed to shaping the social image of what it mean to "be a woman." The title of this analysis, "Beyond the Kiss," refers to the idea that the princess's transformation in both versions should not be defined solely by a magical kiss, but by the determination, empowerment, and courage of the female gender.

One of the best-known narratives and tales is "The Frog Prince", whose first popular version was collected by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the early 19th century and which centuries later was transformed by Disney into an animated film released in 2009 with a new adaptation called The Princess and the Frog. Both versions, although sharing important plot elements, reflect very different visions of the female figure, influenced by the sociocultural context of each era. In a world of constant change and transformation of stereotypes, this analysis proposes a comparison between both versions of the tale to analyze how feminine stereotypes are constructed in each, which aspects are preserved, and which are transformed. Through this comparison, we seek to demonstrate how children's

stories influence the construction of female identity by reaffirming or questioning the roles historically assigned to women.

Literary work

The Fairy Tale of "the Frog Prince" is one of the oldest tales compiled by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. These tales were first included in their collection of Children's and Household Tales (Kinder- und Hausmärchen) in 1812. Although the Brothers Grimm were not the authors of the original tale, they were collectors of traditional German folk tales that were adapted over the years. The social, cultural, and historical context in the Brothers Grimm version was published in the early 19th century, reflecting the patriarchal values and social norms of medieval Europe, where women were seen as objects of value for marriage and motherhood, and their role as women was portrayed as submissive figures whose lives were determined by the power and decisions of the men around them.

The original story begins with a very young princess, the youngest of the king's daughters, who was very beautiful and used to play every day with her golden ball. One day, while playing near the forest, the ball falls into the well. She begins to cry inconsolably until a toad appears and offers to retrieve it, but in return asks her to be his friend and take him with her to the palace. The princess agrees, although she had no intention of keeping her promise.

When the toad returns the ball to her, she runs back to the castle without him. But later, the toad arrives at the palace gate and reminds her of her word. The king upon learning of this, tells his daughter that she must keep her promise. Although disgusted, the princess lets the toad eat with her and takes him to her room. In a moment of rage, annoyed at having to be near him, she throws him against the wall. Suddenly, something magical happens; the toad transforms into a prince who had been the victim of a spell. In the end, the prince takes the princess back to his kingdom, accompanied by his faithful servant Enrique, who is also happy about the story's happy ending.

This story is part of the literary tradition of fairy tales and aims to convey moral values while teaching children behaviors considered appropriate by society. Its plot revolves around themes such as physical and symbolic transformation, the value of promises and their consequences, and the representation of traditional values. Furthermore, it is implicitly a critique of imposed gender roles. It belongs to the narrative genre, specifically fairy tales, and is characterized by the presence of magical and fantastical elements. The story has a simple structure with a final moral and archetypal characters such as the princess, the prince, the king, and, of course, the frog. These figures serve symbolic functions and allow the reader to easily identify the values and lessons the story seeks to convey.

Transformation of Female Stereotypes

Fairy tales have a special power to shape our way of understanding the world. Throughout my life, I have seen how these stories have influenced not only my own ideas but also social imaginaries, especially in relation to gender roles. Although these seemingly innocent tales convey powerful messages about how women should behave in society—how they should act, dress, think, do, and so on. The tale collected by the Brothers Grimm and the Disney adaptation offer a valuable opportunity to analyze how the role of women has evolved in literature, audiovisual media, and society.

An author named Bell Hooks, in her book Feminism Is for Everybody (hooks 2000) addresses various topics of gender, representation, and racial identity, highlighting the importance of inclusive representations in the media and how these impact society. It also offers a critical perspective on how women, especially Black women, have historically been marginalized in the media and how they can have a liberating impact, helping to challenge stereotypes and offering a new perspective on what it means to be a woman.

In the original version compiled by the Brothers Grimm, the princess is portrayed as an obedient, submissive, and passive figure whose main function is to keep a promise she had no choice but to refuse and accept her destiny. She has almost

no decision-making power, and she acts more out of parental imposition than out of her own conviction. This story revolves around a transformation, implying that a woman must accept her destiny, even if it is imposed by external forces, and that it is essential to value a promise more than what she truly wants. Furthermore, the ending reinforces the idea that marriage is a great reward and what every woman yearns for. This idea maintains the stereotype that female happiness is linked to romantic love and union with a man.

On the other hand, in the 2009 film, Princess Tiana breaks some stereotypes and archetypes. Bell hooks' ideas about authentic representation and empowerment are key to understanding how The Princess and the Frog challenges gender and racial stereotypes. Tiana, as an empowered Black woman, breaks the traditional molds of princesses, offering a positive role model that reflects their struggles.

The social, historical, and cultural context reflects 21st-century values, where a more modern and diverse view of gender roles can be seen. The princess is portrayed as an empowered woman who takes control of her destiny and decisions, challenging society's expectations and not depending on a man to achieve her goals.

We can see that she is an independent young African-American woman who dreams of one day owning her own restaurant. One night at her best friend's costume party, she encounters Prince Naveen, who has been turned into a frog by an evil voodoo wizard. The prince mistakes her for a princess, so he convinces her that if she kisses him, she'll become human again. However, after kissing her, Tiana turns into a frog, just like Prince Naveen. The two, bewitched into frogs, go in search of someone to break the spell and begin a whole adventure.

Tiana is characterized as a hard-working woman, a dreamer, and determined to fulfill her dream. This story focuses not only on love but also on personal struggle, effort, and perseverance. Although she unexpectedly finds love and gets married, marriage wasn't the end or goal of the story. The focus was her own personal

fulfillment. This new version shows an active protagonist who makes decisions, faces adversity, and pursues her goals with determination, breaking with the traditional image of the passive and dependent princess. She appears determined and brave. Although the prince helped her fulfill her dream and discover her purpose, she demonstrated that she doesn't need anyone, much less a man, to complement her and achieve her goals.

However, although some progress has been made, certain aspects that limit female representation can still be seen. The frog's transformation, for example, shifts the focus somewhat away from Tiana's personal story, taking the narrative to a more fantastical and less realistic perspective. Despite the many changes, the film still depicts a story where romance is somewhat important for a happy ending; this reflects the fact that even in modern versions, women continue to be pigeonholed into roles that determine their identity.

Both versions offer the sociocultural context in which they were created. The first version reflects the patriarchal norms of the 19th century, where female obedience and marriage were unquestionable virtues, including the clothing in the Grimm story, which is more traditional and symbolic. In contrast, in the Disney version, Tiana's outfits reflect her evolution due to the contemporary context, in which female empowerment and equality are beginning to gain ground in cultural narratives and are a valuable contribution to society's perspective. This transformation in the representation of female roles invites us to reflect on the power of children's narratives and stories to influence the construction of gender identity from a very early age. The comparison of "The Frog Prince" and "The Princess and the Frog" demonstrates a transformation in the representation of the female role, shifting from a passive stereotype to a more active one. However, this transformation still displays traditional elements that must be analyzed in depth to promote more inclusive, diverse, and realistic representations of women.

Analysis

For this analysis, I propose starting with a question that has sparked my curiosity: What do fairy tales really teach us? And to what extent have they shaped our understanding of what it means to be a woman? Beyond fantasy and adventure, I feel these stories hide profound messages worth questioning and understanding. Since childhood, children, and especially girls, have grown up hearing typical stories about princesses. They are usually rescued from enormous, enchanted castles. Women are described as defenseless, very beautiful, gentle, delicate, kind-hearted, obedient, and other adjectives that represent them. These stories very often end with happy endings that almost always depend on a "and they lived happily ever after" after a kiss. But what happens when we look beyond the kiss? This is a magical and symbolic moment, one that many fairy tales often depict as happy endings and a woman's "fulfillment." It is a representation of a magical act that rewards virtue, transforms destiny, and, above all, marks the beginning of a life with the prince.

Below are some key aspects of each version. In "The Frog Prince" by the Brothers Grimm, the princess is portrayed as a spoiled young woman who, being the youngest of her sisters, represents purity. Her golden ball is a symbol of innocence and represents an object of desire and the starting point of conflict. The well is used as a metaphor for the unknown and for transportation to another world. Through the transformation and the magical act in which the frog becomes a prince, the power of keeping promises is symbolized.

The act of throwing the toad against the wall represents emotional changes and the rejection of the other's recognition and value. Another metaphor is the obedience imposed on the princess by patriarchal authority. Finally, marriage is presented as the solution, showing this feminine transformation where love is presented as the final destiny. In this version, closeness to the toad does not represent a romantic decision but an obligation. It also highlights a cultural reality within a genre historically dominated by white figures. Magic occurs as a punishment or moral reward. At the end of the story, we can see how the woman

finds her destiny alongside a man, with the following phrase signifying the fulfillment of the promise and the breaking of the spell:

[...] "Then they slept until the next day and as soon as the sun came up they got into a carriage pulled by seven white horses that had white feathers on their heads and gold chains for reins." (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 2013, P. 25).

While in the other Disney adaptation, Princess Tiana presents herself as a young woman with her own goals, a disciplined woman, who shows her desire to achieve financial independence and self-realization. As she herself states in the following line from the film:

In The Princess and the Frog (Clements & Musker, 2009, 13:10:), Tiana says: [...]"But I'm very close, I'm not going to rest now, all the hard work Dad did won't be in vain."

This phrase definitely shows how her main motivation and desire is to seek self-improvement, not marriage. After analyzing some of the characteristics of the protagonists in both versions, I think it's important to observe how their clothing contributes to representing their personalities and roles in the story. The way the characters dress is not insignificant on the contrary, it is a narrative tool that reinforces the context, values, and type of woman each version tries to portray. In the Brothers Grimm version, the princess is dressed in a traditional way. Although there is no detailed description in the tale, it can be inferred that she wears clothing typical of medieval European royalty, characterized by long dresses made of heavy fabrics and striking colors such as red, gold, or blue. Her long hair, lose or slightly gathered, is possibly blonde or light brown, her fair skin, delicate face, and refined appearance. This type of clothing reflects her social status and passivity, following the typical representations of medieval European princesses. His appearance and clothing reinforce the idea that he doesn't evolve internally throughout the story; he simply fulfills his assigned role.

Figure 1. The Frog Pince

In Disney's adaptation, featuring the culture of New Orleans, where the film is set, Tiana is an African-American woman with an oval face, delicate but defined features, large dark brown eyes, full lips, curly black hair, and a slim, athletic figure. Her physical appearance conveys a balance between traditional femininity and her modern, empowered character. At the beginning of the story, she wears modest work clothes, simple dresses, and aprons, which highlight her humility, hard work, and connection with the people. The blue suit she wears in the costume party scene before her transformation into a princess is a vibrant blue, long, and fitted. She wears a crown, a dress with a full skirt, sparkling embellishments, a modest neckline, and a defined waist. As for her hairstyle and accessories, she wears her hair in a simple but elegant updo.

When she transforms into a princess at the end of the story, her wardrobe is one of the most representative and symbolic. It's a very elegant green dress, inspired by a water lily flower, also known as a water lily. It's bright and flowing, and fitted at the top. The neckline is sweetheart-shaped, elegant without being too revealing. She wears long gloves. The skirt has several layers that open like flower petals. She wears a simple floral headband and her hair is up.

Here, we can see a new archetype of woman, as she doesn't try to imitate European standards, but instead always seeks to showcase her ethnic and cultural identity. In Disney, Tiana represents a diverse, active beauty, demonstrating that each wardrobe change reinforces her emotional evolution and independence. We can see a transition between the hardworking Tiana and the princess she aspires to be.

Figure 2. Princess Tiana serving food

A symbolic object in the film is the dream restaurant, which represents independence and personal progress. The magical talisman and the enchantments represent a tension between dark forces and the danger of power, which are part of the story's conflict. The frog's transformation in this version is not a punishment but a learning process for both Princess Tiana and Prince Naveen. At the same time, it is a metaphor for personal and couple growth, showing a focus on the value of others beyond appearances. Actions such as hard and honorable work can also be seen as a narrative driving force, something far removed from "magical destiny."

Another very important act in the film is the kiss, which is not presented as a final reward, but rather as a decision made by both characters. This kiss symbolizes love as an alliance that seeks to reconcile the conflicts, they both had, showing how

affection and mutual understanding can emerge from tensions. A relevant metaphor in the film is the female role, represented by Tiana, who is described as a hardworking and persevering woman, despite the mockery and obstacles she faces. A clear example of this is seen in the following line from the film: standing can emerge from tensions. A relevant metaphor in the film is the female role, represented by Tiana, who is described as a hardworking and persevering woman, despite the mockery and obstacles she faces. A clear example of this is seen in the following line from the film:

In The Princess and the Frog (Clements & Musker, 2009), Mr. Fenner says:
[...]"Exactly, and for that reason a young woman in your position would never have been able to run her own restaurant."

This storyline reflects the difficulties Tiana faces as a woman in a society that minimizes her achievements and undervalues her. However, this situation also made Tiana stronger and braver, helping her break the mold of being a passive woman. Instead of giving up, she empowered herself to challenge the imposed norms and showed that love was not the goal or the only source of happiness, but rather a part of the journey, reflecting that love is a choice that emerges over time, through experience, learning, and mutual acceptance.

The film not only celebrates racial diversity but also integrates it in a meaningful way. This is a key aspect of the adaptation: Tiana is Disney's first African-American princess, which opens a space for inclusion in children's stories. Her story in New Orleans has cultural aspects specific to the African-American context. This not only exposes princess models but also shows other cultural realities within a genre historically dominated by white figures. In Disney's view, the tale's ultimate message combines love with self-realization, as shown in the songs throughout the film: "Dig a Little Deeper," "Never Knew I Needed," "Down in New Orleans," "Almost There," "When We're Human," "Ma Belle Evangeline," among others.

These not only set the scene for the story but also helped reinforce the themes, conflicts, emotions, and values that the film manages to convey. These songs demonstrate female empowerment, where Tiana sings not about finding a prince but about her future. It is a critique of conformity with the villain's deceptions, celebrating racial cultural diversity and the identity of New Orleans, modern values, and realistic and mature romance. With this verse from the song "Almost There" Tiana sings: "I remember Daddy told me: 'Fairy tales can come true, but you've gotta make 'em happen, it all depends on you.'" (Newman, 2009). It breaks the classic fairy tale model where there is no savior prince as the hero, but rather demonstrates that women can be free to decide and create their own destiny.

After this, exploring "What happens after the kiss?" is fundamental. What happens beyond the kiss involves looking behind the happy ending to analyze how gender roles and stereotypes are constructed in traditional tales and their modern adaptations. Beyond the Kiss proposes a critical look at what lies beyond the traditional romantic gesture. What do they want, what do they dream of, what do they fight for? It explores the evolution and transformational journey of women from the stereotype of being passive to active, from being obedient to determined, from being submissive to free. Going beyond is to question the destiny offered to us and seek what we truly yearn for. Having the opportunity to imagine new possibilities for female characters and for the story to revolve around themselves, their own journey, their decisions, their autonomy, and personal growth.

Conclusions

This comparative analysis between the Brothers Grimm's The Frog Prince and Disney's adaptation of The Princess and the Frog reveals how gender stereotypes, especially those of women, have partially evolved over time, reflecting the social and cultural norms of their respective eras.

Despite the differences I observed in the portrayal of princesses, I identified certain elements that maintain a connection with traditional stereotypes, in terms of the

representation of women, the impact of gender roles, relationships with male characters, personal transformation and growth, independence, autonomy, and motivation. Although Disney's adaptation introduces characteristics that break with traditional archetypes of women's roles, it still retains narrative elements that reinforce the gender stereotypes present in classic stories.

The story, costumes, music, and magical objects in both versions reinforce these role representations, while inviting us to reflect on the power of children's narratives to shape expectations and challenge social and cultural structures. These representations play an important role in the construction of the gender identity of the new generations.

In a world where love and dreams continue to be powerful, I would dare say that, today, princesses no longer wait to be saved by a prince, but rather, they become the heroines of their own stories. True magic is not found in a spell or a kiss, but in the inner strength that every woman has to transform her destiny and, in the ability, to write her own story, choosing, with courage and determination, the path she wishes to follow. Therefore, as a society, we must continue to reflect on how we represent women in narratives, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment, to build a more equitable society. Only in this way can we ensure that women occupy our own space not only in fairy tales but also in real life, in all spheres of society, without being limited by the gender stereotypes that have existed for centuries. By recognizing and challenging stereotypes, we can create a world where every woman has the freedom to be who she wants to be and to shape her own destiny, just like today's heroines.

"The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud." — Coco Chanel

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